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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

President Bush is dead set on opening the Mexican border. We are plenty edgy about that subject in the Shortgrass Country. We don't know whether it would mean we'll have cowboys again from Northern Mexico, or maybe some highlight like a big herd of undipped ticky cattle. In fact, we know more about closing than we do opening the border, because plenty of us have lost a lot of dough over quarantines and bureaucratic side shows.

About 30 years ago, Mr. Bush came by the Old Ranch, running for the U.S. Senate. I don't know for sure, but I don't think anything we did that day started him thinking about free trade.

We were spraying cattle at the pens over on railroad when he drove up and parked. The guy that does ranch equipment improvising at Mertzon just replaced the tank on the sprayer with a heavy duty oil drum. The first person to have a chance to talk to Mr. Bush was a cowboy that was holding the governor down on the sprayer engine so it'd run.

Part of the crew was from Mexico. The Boss, however, was so cranky about who rode his Thoroughbred horses that we probably hadn't made much of show penning the cattle. The only unpapered aliens the Boss allowed to ride anything

decent were a couple of brothers from Musquiz. One of them might have been there that day, but I know the youngest of the two was in jail in Villa Acuna.

The mesquite tree by the pens didn't give us much shade to talk that morning. Once the hornflies started moving off the cattle onto the saddle horses, they became disruptive, kicking and setting back on their reins.

Before Mr. Bush left, I had to decline his offer to be his county campaign chairman. I wish he'd said he wanted to be President. Maybe if I'd known he was an ambitious man, we could have postponed spraying those old cows for an hour or two and hashed over what to do about Mexican cowboys